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ABSTRACT

Learning to appreciate religious art and to understand the interdependence of history and art are basic to the foundations of culture. Students need to be exposed to the art of the diverse adherents of all major religions in order to understand the beliefs and practices of others. Students can examine religious art from ancient times, including sacred spaces set aside to summon sacred deities (e.g., Stonehenge in England) and the drawings and paintings of animals found on the walls of caves in southwestern Europe. Students can also examine the effects that Christianity had upon sculpture, painting, churches, cathedrals, and stained glass; the Renaissance influence; how the conflict between the Christian religion and the affairs of state in Russia resulted in the building of magnificent cathedrals; how history influenced the work of some artists who attempted to portray the world around them, especially the world of the downtrodden; the art of Islamic culture; and the art of Buddhism and Hinduism in India and China. (RM)

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HISTORY AND ART: THE HEART OF ART

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History and Art: The Heart of Art

Learning to appreciate religious art and to understand the interdependence of history and art are basic to the foundations of our culture. In the majority opinion of the famous Abington Case, U.S. Supreme Court Justice Thomas Clark wrote,". . . One's education is not complete without the study of comparative religion or the history of religion and its relationship to the advancement of civilization." Certainly religious art falls within this framework of legal and desirable education.

Students need to be exposed to art of the diverse adherents of all major religions. History and art can work together to help students develop attitudes of understanding the beliefs and practices of others free of value judgments. Students also can begin to comprehend the relationship art and history have with literature, architecture, archeology, languages and geography. History need not be an endless string of people, dates and events to be memorized. Rather, art can help clarify, as well as preserve the spiritual essence of various periods of history.

No culture in any period of history has been without some form of religion. Anthropologists and historians tell us that from the beginning, man felt this need when mystified by the forces of nature, threatened by wild beasts and perplexed by death and the hereafter and fear of the unknown. In The Outline of History H. G. Wells stated: "Wherever primitive civilization set its foot in Africa, Europe, or western Asia, a temple arose, and where the civilization is most ancient, in Egypt and in Sumer, there the temple is most in evidence. . .The beginnings of civilization and the appearance of temples is simultaneous in history. The two things belong together."

In ancient times, sacred spaces were set aside to summon sacred deities. Many archeologists think that Stonehenge in England was used in religious rites. This pretentious cromlech, or circle of stones, may have been used for sun worship. Its circle, about 100 feet in diameter, consists of an outer ring of huge monoliths, capped with lintels, roughly cut just as they came from the quarry and laid without mortar. These monoliths were once called The Giants' Dance, a circle of petrified beings who could be awakened to life once more.

The fine drawings and paintings of animals still visible on the walls of caves in southwestern Europe are another type of art remaining from 15,000 to 20,000 years ago. It is surmised that some of these paintings were used for target practice with the belief that hitting a picture of an animal might give magic powers to the hunter.

From 2500 B.C. to A.D. 650, five of the world's great religious developed, at a time when many tribesmen and herders were leaving their old ways and moving into the cities. This migration, in turn, influenced religious art forms. Sacred spaces became more elaborate churches, and symbols and ritual acts were shown in statues, paintings, banners, clothing, jewelry, objects and relics.

The largest religious body in the world is Christianity, claiming a total

membership of nearly one and a half billion, or about a third of the world's population. History shows us that as world events were unfolding, art was influenced by what was happening. In the Medieval Period, Constantine proclaimed Christianity as the state religion of the Roman Empire. Again after Clovis was baptized, there was a surge in converts. The common people were obsessed to a great degree about Hell and damnation, as well as a fear of physical safety. Therefore, they gave up some personal freedoms to join feudal lords for protection. Art reflects such feelings through sculptures, painting and stained glass windows which tell the stories of the Bible and the afterlife as well. Constantine shared these feelings and had his architects build churches in Rome, the Holy Land and Constantinople.

The process of making colored glass, which probably originated in the Near East about the 9th century, was adopted by Italian artists a century later. The earliest record of use of stained glass in making pictorial windows occurs in an account of the rebuilding of Rheims Cathedral in the late 10th century.

During the Gothic Period, (13th - 16th century), a number of men attempted to change the church by translating the Bible into the language of the people. However, many reformers became martyrs because of their beliefs. Each new soaring cathedral built seemed to grow taller as people wanted to show their love for God in building these edifices that oftentimes took 100 years to erect. Every part of the structure, ground plan, elevation, paintings, statuary, stained glass windows, told some part of the Bible. Many people were unable to read so this was a form of communication. The church held great power at this time and illiteracy was one method of staving off rebellions or resistance. Some of the more magnificent cathedrals from this period are Notre Dame and Sainte Chappelle in Paris, and Salisbury, Winchester, Westminster Abbey and York Minster in England.

The Renaissance (14th - 16th centuries) brought new attitudes toward life and the development of the individual and greater freedom of thought and curiosity about man and his world. Consequently, painting and sculpture reached its zenith during this time since it was a period of rebirth of inspiration from Greek and Roman art. Many artists of Europe, led by those from Italy, began to portray the beauty of nature and the human form. Botticelli, Donatello, Leonardo da Vinci, Michelangelo and Raphael are some of the outstanding artists. St. Peter's Cathedral in Rome is the climax of architecture of the period. Other well-known churches are St. George's and St. Jacob's in Germany and the Grossmunster in Switzerland.

Nowhere in the world did the Christian religion become more entangled in the affairs of state than it did in Czarist Russia. Today an incomparable treasure consisting of all forms of art rests in The Hermitage, where the results of this partnership are guarded. The Patriarchs of Orthodoxy rejected reunion with the Roman church and envisioned Moscow as replacing Constantinople for all followers of the Eastern faith. The Church even helped to invent and circulate legends that Ivan the Great was a direct descendent of Constantine. Ivan later commissioned the building of two of the most magnificent cathedrals in the Kremlin, the Assumption and the Annunciation, with large gold-topped domes. Churches in the Kremlin followed an edict in 1650 by the Patriarch of Russia that all churches must use one architectural plan, a square plan with five domes; the central one over the crossing and one over each angle between the arms of the cross.

Within each of the Russian cathedrals is the iconostasis, an elaborate screen which separates the sanctuary from the main body of the church. It contains the sacred images arranged according to rigid regulation. Again, these

icon paintings were the means for the peasants to learn the stories from the Bible.

Other fabulous works of art were the elegant cassocks of the Patriarchs and Metropolitans of the church; the elaborate covers for the Books of the Holy Gospels made of pearl, silver and other precious stones; the silver "Jerusalem" or Tabernacle of Jesus; and the 'caps' or crowns, fashioned from jewels and the richest of furs for coronations.

Certainly the Cathedral of St. Basil, built to commemorate a victory over the Tartars, has been a source of wonderment and awe for generations because of its unique contour. It embodies the splendor and mystique of old Russia.

At the present time, history continues to influence the work of some artists who attempt to portray the world around them, mostly in the areas of compassion for the down-trodden of the world. Notable among these is Pablo Picasso's antiwar masterpiece, "Guernica," which expresses his indignation against exploitation of humanity, animals, and nature. Another is Rouault who paints also about the forgotten of this world.

In turning to the history and art of another religion, it is established that Arab culture preceded Islam. A new era in language and the arts evolved with the coming of the Prophet Muhammad. The world was now seen in different ways with new cultural contributions, circa 620 A.D.

The beginning of the Muslim era was the migration of the Prophet Muhammad and his followers in 622. Muhammad died in 632 and by this time Mecca had been conquered and the Arabian Peninsula for the most part had become Islamic.

The Umayyad dynasty (661-750) ruled after the death of Ali, a successor of Muhammad. The most valuable contributions of the period can be found in both religious and secular architecture and its decoration, as well as ceramics, metalwork and glass.

The architectural masterpiece of Islamic culture is the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem. The Koranic inscriptions embedded in the sacred rock reveal the basic ideals of Islam and the overwhelming influence of Muhammad. The Umayyad victories are represented by mosaics and the Byzantine and Sasanian traditions of the Near East in the decoration of the Dome of the Rock. It is unique architecturally and structurally symbolic of a new time in history.

The Umayyads contributed a great variety of elements in secular architecture. Paintings, stone and stucco carvings, and decorative mosaics reveal a wide range of forms and ideas. The carvings represented by floral and geometric designs depict activities of the rulers and astrological subjects. Some, however, were purely ornamental.

Islam was influenced by the classical, Christian and Sasanian traditions of the Near East, as well as Central Asia and India. During the Abbasid period (750-1258) prosperity was noted in the economic realm, and arts and science saw a burst of energy.

Large religious buildings in Islam are the colossal mosques of al-Mutawakkil and the palace of al-Mutasim. The exteriors of these buildings are embellished with Abbasid wall paintings and stucco decoration.

The Koran, the sacred book written in Arabic containing the teachings of the Prophet is truly representative of the Islamic era. Two elements resulting from the writing of the Koran are calligraphy and arabesque. Calligraphy, an abstract form of decoration which perpetuates the Word of God, was used both in secular and religious architecture and art. The arabesque included geometric and floral designs resulting in a feeling of power.

The art of the Fatimids represents the Transitional Period. The Fatimids contributed great religious mosques, several of which are still standing. In

the mosques of al-Azhar, al-Hakim and al-Akmar, observers will find carved woodwork, textiles, ceramics, wall paintings, ivory, glass and metalwork which provide a glimpse into the past magnificence of the palaces.

Realistic episodes, religious scenes, and courtly activities are found in the ceilings of such structures as the Cappella Palatina in Palermo, the private chapel of Roger II, the king of Sicily. Many of these features were developed in the Islamic era.

During the rise and fall of dynasties from mid-11th to mid-13th century, political chaos was evident but the expression of art created a period in time regarded as classical. Examples of pictorial manuscripts, metalwork and ceramics have been found. Human figures played an important part in various art forms during the second half of the 12th century.

Inlaid brasses were prevalent and richly decorated with astronomical subjects, real or imaginary animals, and human representation. Metalwork and pottery centers were established in Syria.

The economic and cultural revival of Egypt and Syria came forth under the rule of the Mamluks (1250-1382). The Mamluks were renowned as the defenders of the true faith opposing the Shiites, Christians and pagan Mongols. The Sultans and other rulers of the government encouraged architecture and art forms such as manuscripts, ceramics, glass, metalwork and textiles. The rise of the science of heraldry and the appearance of blazons on many objects gave researchers valuable insight into the history of the period.

The mosques and mausoleums of the great sultans were monumental in size. Unique enameled and gilded glass was thought to be the greatest achievement of the Mamluks. Bowls, goblets, beakers, vases, bottles and flasks were embellished with heraldic emblems, inscriptions, arabesques, and human and animal figures.

Metalwork was perfected by the Mamluk artists, and basins, ewers, candlesticks, large tables and Koran cases represent this development. Inlaid techniques included gold and silver, decorated with inscriptions and geometric figures mixed with arabesques and animals. Engravings replaced the technique of inlaying.

In the West, the Christian church and state used art to awe and subjugate. The distance between God and human was increased since "high art" of the church was unreachable and removed from close inspection or use.

The East found unity in art, religion, science, medicine, magic, dance, legend, feast, ritual, image, icon symbol, and song which penetrates the everyday life of the people. The West separates art from craft, but the art and rituals of Asia reveal a view of the world through a state of consciousness. Monuments and images comprise some of the most beautiful art in the Eastern world. Some sculpture was meant to cure in China where piles of carved rocks at Borobudur would bring wisdom. Symbolic art was a powerful agent in conversion and worship in Buddhism since it could teach unlearned tribesmen about Buddha.

Both Hinduism and Buddhism originated in India, but Buddhism spread to become the major faith of Asia. The peoples of early India were not unified by a central authority, so only religion brought the separate villages together. In early Indian art (3000 B.C.) as in the Near East there were tree and serpent worship and composite animals were symbols of power. These ideas survived the Aryan invasion to flower again in Hindu imagination.

Biblical religions assume a creator God, but Indian thought assumes each person has lived several lives before his present one. In popular Hinduism

Brahma was the creator of the universe with Sararvati his consort. Vishu is the hero who saved the day for gods and humans. Shiva is the destroyer to placate by sacrifice. There are 33 million gods in all, and devotees usually keep an image in the home to represent the deity chosen.

When the Aryans came from Iran to conquer the darker skinned Dravidians, at first Indian society was divided into colors. Later the basic Indian culture formed a hierarchical grouping based on vocation with the caste system of priests, warriors and husbandmen with one more caste added later--the serf. The four groups evolved into the hereditary caste system that exists today of 3000 subcasts and stirred reformers such as Buddha and Gandhi. Due to Gandhi's efforts India's constitution now bans untouchability--the lowest outcasts. From old they were scavengers who were considered polluted and excluded from using wells, paths or schools and temples used by caste Hindus.

Buddhism, Islam, and Christianity were all missionary religions with Buddhism professing that man could be shown a way to end suffering and the Hindu wheel of rebirth. Conduct could overcome a profane existence. Siddhartha Guatama was born in 536 B.C. in Southern Nepal and although he was a prince, his revelations made him Buddha--the Enlightened One. Buddha gave up his position and family to wander and preach a message of compassion or to stay in monastic centers forging a life of right action among followers.

Buddhism died in its original homeland and Hinduism revived in the 6th C. after the Guptas and gradually assumed its place as the dominant religion of India. Mural art declined since Hindu beliefs did not encourage large scale wall painting. Sculpture was well suited to Hindu cave sanctuaries. Unlike Buddhism congregational worship, Hindu devotions can be performed before an image privately. The Hindu temple is the residence of the god and

needs only a place for his image and a separate place for the worshipper.

"All the natural splendor and variety of India has resulted in the development of a great civilization, in the birth and growth of religions, philosophies, and artistic styles, which together unquestionably represent one of the peaks of human achievement" (Kitagawa, 1971).

Indian Buddhist styles of art were brought to Asia over the Central Asian trade routes before Chinese styles of Buddhist art were carried back to Central Asia over those same camel tracks. Buddhism gained converts in China during the troubled Six Dynasties period (A.D. 317-589) when all northern China was overrun by Tartor tribes. Invaders were Buddhist converts who taught the conquered they would gain merit by making images and fashioning sanctuaries in the name of the Buddha.

This 400 year old religion offered a new personal hope. Since Buddhism broke down many of China's rigid codes of the past, it had a liberating effect on artists with a profound source of inspiration. Religious art flourished since religious sculpture and paintings were felt to be a source of spiritual redemption.

Where contact between China and the rest of the world is recognized by Marco Polo's chronicles and influences on the west are dated from the opening of sea routes by Portuguese and Italian navigators in the 16th C., the influence of China on Japan is not to be underestimated. "Chinese writing, Chinese Buddhist sculpture, architecture, figure painting, the customs and heirarchy of the Chinese court, and the concept of city and temple planning along geometric lines were all adopted by the Japanese" (Josephy, 1969). The islands of Japan were the last to receive Asiatic culture from India and China. Early inhabitants worshipped mountains, streams and trees. No written records exist

until Buddhism was introduced in A.D. 552 when the king of Korea sent an image of the Buddha to the emperor of Japan with sacred texts and a letter recommending adoption of the new religion. It became widespread by the end of the sixth century.

When the Mongols destroyed the Sung Dynasty, numbers of Chinese moved to Japan and they continued the philosophy that emphasized meditation--Zen Buddhism in Japan or Ch'an Buddhism in China. Japanese painters and artists received this Chinese influence in temple construction, gardens, flower arrangement, tea ceremonies, and brush painting.

Today there are 180,000,000 Buddhists with most dwelling on the rim of Eastern Asia. The U.S. has 100,000 Buddhists. In Buddhism man could be shown a way to end suffering and the wheel of rebirth of the Hindu belief. Buddhism has been called atheistic since it is indifferent to traditional gods. Nirvana is bliss or emptiness-a state yearned for.

Anthropologists have found no culture without religion. Primitive man sought his answers in ritual and myth. Ritual actions which imitated the original creative acts of the gods were engaged in to partake of the timelessness of the gods themselves. Myths developed to enrich these rituals and embellish them.

Where sacred spaces of primitive man existed in caves and grottoes and mountains, crude buildings were forerunners to the efforts to summon the sacred with spires, stained glass windows, mosaics, and monumental cathedrals. Religious art attempts to express man's basic concern about the meaning of life. Many preindustrial societies see time as a circle not as a straight

line. From the Mayas to the Hindus, time was circular and repetitive—history repeating itself endlessly, lives perhaps reliving themselves through reincarnation.

The community of truth attracts people from all ages and civilizations as they ponder the mysterious universe around them. The cardinal Buddhist concept of the organic interrelatedness of all phenomena in the universe has something to say to Western man who is now slowly realizing that science and materialism do not solve all man's problems. The collective wisdom of the ages as gathered in the teachings of Buddhism and Christianity may offer insights to man's global problems through philosophy with universal perspectives.

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